MAKE YOUR BUSINESS GROW.
ADVERTISE IN
DAWN INDUSTRY SUPPLEMENTS
Call Manager Supplements in
Karachi Lahore or Islamabad
on UAN: 111-444-777

DAWN

Azerbaijan will not send troops to Gaza

Foreign Press Association criticises Israel for maintaining ban on media's access to the Palestinian territory

BAKU: Azerbaijan has no intention of sending its troops for peacekeeping operations outside its borders, including in Gaza, President Ilham Aliyev said on Monday.

Aliyev, interviewed by Azeri television channels, said Azerbaijan had been in consultation with the US administration about the operation of a peacekeeping force in Gaza.

"We prepared a questionnaire and provided it to the American side. No participation in peacekeeping forces is envisaged," Aliyev said.

"I am not considering participation in hostilities outside Azerbaijan at all."

An Azeri government source had said in November that Azerbaijan would provide no troops for such an operation unless there was a complete halt to the "fighting in Gaza".

Meanwhile, an international media association criticised the Israeli government for maintaining its ban on unrestricted media access to Gaza, calling the move disappointing.

The Israeli government had told the country's top court in a submission last week that the ban should remain in place, citing "security risks" in the Gaza Strip.

The submission was in response to a petition filed by the Foreign Press Association (FPA), which represents hundreds of journalists in Israel and Palestinian territories. It sought immediate and unrestricted access for foreign journalists to Gaza Strip.

"The Foreign Press Association expresses its profound disappointment with the Israeli government's latest response to our appeal for full and free access to the Gaza Strip," the association said.

"Instead of presenting a plan for allowing journalists into Gaza independently and letting us work alongside our brave Palestinian colleagues, the (Israeli) government has decided once again to lock us out" despite the ceasefire in the territory, it added.

Since the outbreak of the Gaza conflict in Oct 2023, Israel has barred foreign journalists from independently entering the devastated territory.

Instead, Tel Aviv has allowed only a limited number of reporters to enter Gaza on a case-by-case basis, embedded with its military inside the blockaded Palestinian territory.

The FPA filed its petition in 2024, after which Israel's supreme court granted the government several extensions to submit its response.

Last month, however, the court set Jan 4 as a final deadline for the government to present a plan for allowing media access to Gaza.

In its submission, the government maintained that the ban should remain in place.

"This is for security reasons, based on the position of the defence establishment, which maintains that a security risk associated with such entry still exists," the Israeli government's submission said.

The government also said that the search for the remains of the last prisoner held in Gaza was ongoing, suggesting that allowing journalists in at this stage could hinder the operation.

The remains of Ran Gvili, whose body was taken to Gaza after he was killed during the Hamas raid on Oct 7, 2023, have still not been recovered despite the ceasefire.

The FPA said it planned to submit a "robust response" to the court, and expressed hope the "judges will put an end to this charade".

"The FPA is confident that the court will provide justice in light of the continuous infringement of the fundamental principles of freedom of speech, the public's right to know and free press," the association added.

Israel's supreme court is expected to issue a ruling on the matter, though it is unclear when a decision will be handed down.—AFP

US to lead Ukraine ceasefire monitoring

• Paris summit draft statement says Washington would support multinational force in case of renewed Russian attack • European-led force to be deployed in Ukraine after ceasefire

FRANCE'S President Emmanuel Macron (left) and Ukraine's President Volodymyr Zelensky arrive at the Elysee Palace for the Coalition of the Willing meeting.—AFP

PARIS: European allies of Ukraine, along with the United States, have agreed on "robust" security guarantees that would see Washington lead a truce monitoring mechanism once a ceasefire is reached, French President Emmanuel Macron said on Tuesday.

Macron, British Prime Minister Keir Starmer and Ukrainian leader Volodymyr Zelensky signed a declaration of intent that foresees Britain, France and other European allies deploying troops on Ukrainian territory after a ceasefire.

Macron said after the meeting in Paris that the moves represented "robust security guarantees for a solid and lasting peace", hailing an "operational convergence" among allies including the United States.

The security guarantees are "the key to ensuring that a peace agreement can never mean a Ukrainian surrender and that a peace agreement can never mean a new threat to Ukraine" from Russia, Macron said.

Washington would commit to "support" a European-led multinational force — deployed in Ukraine after any ceasefire — in case of a new attack by Russia, he added.

Against the background of tensions between Europe and Washington on Greenland and Venezuela, US envoy Steve Witkoff, who was present at the talks in Paris, said "a lot of progress" had been made.

Allies have "largely finished" agreeing security guarantees for Ukraine "so that the people of Ukraine know that when this ends, it ends forever", he said, flanked by President Donald Trump's son-in-law Jared Kushner.

Witkoff said that "land options" will be the most "critical issue" and "hopefully we will be able to come up with certain compromises with regard to that".

Starmer said following a ceasefire, the UK and France will establish "military hubs" across Ukraine and "build protected facilities for weapons and military equipment to support Ukraine's defensive needs".

But he warned: "We can only get to a peace deal if (Russian President Vladimir) Putin is ready to make compromises. Putin is not showing he is ready for peace." "This only hardens our resolve."

Merz on Germany's role

Chancellor Friedrich Merz said German forces could join a multinational force to monitor a ceasefire, but based on territory bordering the war-battered country.

"Germany will keep contributing politically, financially and militarily. This could, for example, include deploying forces to Ukraine on neighbouring Nato territory after a ceasefire," he said.

Once a US-backed monitoring force is agreed, the German government and parliament "will decide on the nature and extent of a German contribution", he said.

For now, Berlin was "not ruling anything out", Merz said in Paris.

Germany, with its history of war and the Holocaust, has long been more reluctant than many of its Nato allies to deploy forces abroad.

But Merz has signalled continued strong support for Ukraine, sharply raised German defence spending and announced plans to build up the Bundeswehr into Europe's strongest conventional army.

His suggestion of deploying German troops to neighbouring Nato territory did not go as far as France and Britain, which offered more explicit promises of support.—AFP

Pakistani, Chinese researchers embark on ocean study cruise

Exercise aimed at improving understanding of Pakistani marine environment

By Shazia Hasan

PNS Behr Masah is a hydrographic survey ship with the capability to undertake necessary oceanographic as well as geo-physical surveys.—Courtesy NHO

KARACHI: The Pakistan Navy, through its National Hydrographic Office (NHO), is facilitating a Pakistan-China Joint Oceanographic Cruise, it emerged on Tuesday.

According to a navy statement, PNS Behr Masah has been deployed in support of this scientific mission, which is being conducted by the National Institute of Oceanography (NIO) in collaboration with China's Second Institute of Oceanography.

According to NHO, the Behr Masah is a hydrographic survey ship with the capability to undertake oceanographic and geo-physical surveys.

In a statement issued on Tuesday, the navy underscored its commitment to promoting maritime awareness and facilitate marine scientific research in Pakistan.

The Joint Oceanographic Cruise represents a significant scientific collaboration between Pakistan and China, aimed at enhanced understanding of the marine environment in Pakistani waters.

The research outcomes are expected to increase awareness of coastal and offshore marine dynamics, enabling better assessment of environmental patterns and supporting informed maritime planning and policymaking.

According to the NIO, the signing ceremony of the 'Letter of Agreement on China-Pakistan Joint Cruises for Marine Environment and Ecosystem in Pakistan Coastal Area' was held in Hangzhou, China, on Dec 12, 2025.

The NIO initiated the joint marine cruises with China's Second Institute of Oceanography for the collection of marine environmental and ecosystem data across all four seasons in Pakistan's coastal areas.

This will be an opportunity for senior representatives of both institutions to collaborate on marine ecosystems, coastal dynamics, climate change, and the sustainable utilisation of ocean resources. It will be a shared commitment to scientific cooperation, data exchange, joint research initiatives and capacity building.

Through this initiative, Pakistani scientists will have the opportunity to analyse samples in Chinese laboratories, which is not possible in Pakistan due to the lack of expensive laboratory equipment and machines. Pakistani personnel will also have opportunities for training on ocean equipment innovation, equipment operation, data collection techniques on board, and post-cruise laboratory analysis.

Israeli FM tours Somaliland, angering Somalia

NAIROBI: Israeli Foreign Minister Gideon Saar visited Somaliland on Tuesday on a trip that was denounced by Somalia, 10 days after Israel formally recognised the self-declared republic as an independent and sovereign state.

Israel is the only country that has formally recognised Somaliland's move to break away from Somalia, which described Israel's decision on recognition as an "unlawful step" and said Saar's visit as a "serious violation" of its sovereignty.

In a statement on X, Saar said that he had held talks "on the full range of relations" with Somaliland's president, Abdirahman Mohamed Abdullahi, in the capital Hargeisa.

"We are determined to vigorously advance relations between Israel and Somaliland," Saar wrote on X, alongside images of him meeting the Somaliland leader at the presidential palace.

Somaliland's information ministry earlier said on X that Saar was leading a high-level delegation. It gave no further details but a senior Somaliland official disclosed before the meeting with the president that the Israeli foreign minister was expected to discuss ways to enhance bilateral ties.

Saar said Abdullahi had accepted an invitation from Netanyahu to make an official visit to Israel.

Netanyahu has said Israel will pursue cooperation in agriculture, health, technology and the economy.—Reuters

Machado vows to rush back to Venezuela, demands election

US raid undermines international law: UN

WASHINGTON: Venezuela's main opposition leader Maria Corina Machado, who escaped from Venezuela in disguise in October to receive the Nobel Peace Prize that she then dedicated to Trump, has vowed to return home quickly, praising US President Donald Trump for toppling her enemy Nicolas Maduro and declaring her movement ready to win a free election.

"I'm planning to go back to Venezuela as soon as possible," said Machado. "We believe that this transition should move forward," she told *Fox News* in an interview. "We won an election (in 2024) by a landslide under fraudulent conditions. In free and fair elections, we will win over 90pc of the votes."

Trump, however, has said the US needs to help address Venezuela's problems before an election, calling a 30-day timeline unrealistic. "We have to fix the country first. You can't have an election. Theres no way the people could even vote," Trump told *NBC*.

On the other hand, the United Nations said the US air strikes on Venezuela and the seizing of the country's leader on the weekend clearly "undermined a fundamental principle of international law".

"States must not threaten or use force against the territorial integrity or political independence of any state," Ravina Shamdasani, spokeswoman for the UN rights office, told reporters in Geneva.

"And this is what we are seeing," she said, calling on the international community to "come together with one voice... to make clear that this is an action that in contravention of the international law that was set up by member states".

US commandos backed by warplanes, the navy and air strikes, forcibly seized Maduro and his wife Cilia Flores on Saturday.

Maduro, who became president in 2013 after taking over from his mentor Hugo Chavez, appeared in a New York court to deny 'drug trafficking and other charges' brought by Washington, insisting he had rather been kidnapped.

Venezuela's first female head of state, Rodriguez, has wavered between angry defiance and potential cooperation with Trump as the latter has threatened another strike if her government displeases him.

On the other hand, Trump has said the US is now in charge of Venezuela and will help revive its oil industry.

Trump said the US would secure interests, notably access to oil, by forcing cooperation with interim leader Delcy Rodriguez.

Speaking to US House Republicans, Trump said he would meet oil companies soon. —Agencies

European leaders rally behind Greenland amid renewed US interest

COPENHAGEN: Leaders from major European powers rallied behind Greenland on Tuesday, saying in a joint statement that the Arctic island belongs to its people, following renewed interest by US President Donald Trump in taking over the Danish territory.

Trump has in recent weeks repeated that he wants to gain control of Greenland, an idea first voiced in 2019 during his first presidency, arguing that it is vital for the US military, and that Denmark has not done enough to protect it.

A US military operation over the weekend in which Venezuela President was seized, has further rekindled concerns that Greenland might face a similar scenario. Greenland has repeatedly said it does not want to be part of the United States.

"Greenland belongs to its people. It is for Denmark and Greenland, and them only, to decide on matters concerning Denmark and Greenland," said the statement by leaders of France, Britain, Germany, Italy, Poland, Spain, and Denmark.

They said security in the Arctic must be achieved collectively with Nato allies, including the US.

"NATO has made clear that the Arctic region is a priority and European Allies are stepping up," the statement said. "We and many other Allies have increased our presence, activities, and investments, to keep the Arctic safe and to deter adversaries."

Polish Prime Minister Donald Tusk said Denmark could count on the solidarity of all of Europe on the issue of Greenland.

"No member should attack or threaten another member of the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation. Otherwise, Nato would lose its meaning if conflict or mutual conflicts occurred within the alliance," Tusk told reporters in Warsaw.

The Netherlands also fully supports the joint statement, Dutch PM Dick Schoof said on X.

To fend off US criticism over Greenland's defence capabilities, Denmark last year pledged $6.58 billion to boost its military presence in the Arctic.

World 'governed by force'

In comments likely to alarm Washington's European allies, White House Chief of Staff Stephen Miller brushed aside concerns about Danish sovereignty and international law.

"You can talk all you want about international niceties and everything else. But we live in a world, in the real world, that is governed by strength, that is governed by force, that is governed by power," Miller told *CNN* on Monday. —Reuters

Did India lobby with Trump over Pakistan conflict?

• *The Hindu* report says lobbying firm headed by former Trump aide Jason Miller led engagement with US officials on New Delhi's behalf • Former diplomats say use of lobbyists is normal, but important meetings are usually set up directly by diplomats

By Our Correspondent

NEW DELHI: Although the government of Narendra Modi has persistently denied that the US played any role in mediating an end to the four-day India-Pakistan conflict following the Pahalgam incident, a report in *The Hindu* details how a lobbying firm engaged by New Delhi made hectic calls to approach US officials on May 10, and beyond.

According to a filing with the Department of Justice under the Foreign Agent Registration Act (FARA) – including 60 entries made in December 2025 – did not divulge whether the calls on May 10 were made before or after the ceasefire, "they indicate close interaction on the day", *The Hindu* wrote.

It said the embassy approached White House Chief of Staff Susie Wiles, US Trade Representative Jamieson Greer, and Ricky Gill at the National Security Council to discuss "media coverage" of the conflict.

This seems to contradict New Delhi's stance, which has repeatedly denied several claims by US President Donald Trump, as well as Secretary of State Marco Rubio's decision to award Mr Gill for the role he played in defusing the crisis.

In particular, the External Affairs Ministry consistently denied Trump's contention he had threatened to stop trade if the conflict was not ended, and the call made to Mr Greer to discuss Operation Sindoor is particularly significant, the paper said.

The filings by US lobby firm SHW LLC raised eyebrows amongst diplomats in New Delhi as the firm also claimed that it set up meetings for several Indian officials — from External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar, to Foreign Secretary Vikram Misri, Deputy National Security Advisor Pavan Kapoor, and even Indian Ambassador Vinay Kwatra — with top Trump administration officials over the past year.

SHW LLC was contracted by the Indian Embassy on April 24, 2025. *Dawn* had previously reported on May 2 that former Trump aide Jason Miller's firm had been engaged by New Delhi as a registered foreign agent for $150,000 per month.

It had no other clients over the year, according to the six FARA filings it made, and has been paid $900,000 in two quarterly instalments as part of an annual contract for $1.8 million.

The practice is a first, say former and current Indian officials, and indicates that rather than normal bilateral channels, the engagements – broadly over India-US trade ties and Operation Sindoor – were set up by the firm, led by former Trump spokesperson Miller, who is listed as the principal of SHW LLC.

While the embassy has always contracted two to three lobbyists at a time, to consult them on working with the Democrat and Republican parties, this is the first time a lobby firm has been asked to set up meetings with US officials, as also to schedule calls with government officials.

"Such meetings are routinely sought by the mission directly," at least two Indian government officials told *The Hindu*.

"This seems to indicate that the Trump administration has set new rules of engagement and the government has been left with little choice but to play along," a former diplomat, who had served at the Indian embassy previously, said.

"The Indian Embassy has hired such firms, consistent with local practice and requirements, under successive governments since the 1950s," a spokesperson for the Indian embassy in Washington said.

About the lobbying firm, *The Hindu* quoted another official as saying that lobbyists are hired "for advice and to understand the landscape, giving advice, and opening some doors," but that meetings and calls are made between diplomats directly.

Apart from the calls on May 10, 2025, the firm billed the Embassy for making requests for the Parliamentary delegation led by Opposition leader Shashi Tharoor to meet US Vice-President J.D. Vance and others.

On June 23, 2025, days before Mr. Jaishankar's visit to Washington to attend the Quad Foreign Ministers' meeting, SHW says that it sent emails requesting meetings for the Minister with Mr. Vance, Secretary of War Pete Hegseth, and CIA chief John Ratcliffe.

Of 60 entries detailing requests from the Indian Embassy, 30 recorded by SHW were requests for telephone calls to trade officials and White House senior officials to "discuss [the] status of US-India trade conversations".

The calls increased in frequency as relations nosedived over US decisions to impose 25pc reciprocal tariffs and another 25pc in penalty tariffs for India's oil procurement.

As tensions abated after Trump and Modi exchanged cordial words over social media, SHW said it made calls to White House officials to "flag social media post by Prime Minister Modi".

Trump subsequently called Modi for his birthday on September 17, 2025, and the two leaders have spoken several times since then.

Printed at Pakistan Herald Publications (Pvt) Ltd by Khalil Mohsin and published for Pakistan Herald Publications (Pvt) Ltd by Shahjahan at Haroon House, Dr. Ziauddin Ahmed Road, Karachi. EDITOR: ZAFFAR ABBAS